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The Social Questions Bulletin

Issued Monthly Except July and August by

THE METHODIST FEDERATION FOR SOCIAL SERVICE

An organization which seeks to abolish the profit system in order to develop a classless society based upon the obligation of mutual service.

150 FIFTH AVENUE, NEW YORK CITY

EDITORS: HARRY F. WARD; WINIFRED L. CHAPPELL

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WE MOVE FORWARD

The nation-wide attack on this organization by the forces of reaction and suppression has had two results. It prevented any clear-cut official statement on the nature of the economic order. It solidified our forces and helped us to clarify both our goal and our position. Our national meeting confirmed the platform and program worked out in the regional conferences. It put a brief preamble before the platform stating its religious background. It inserted a sentence saying what we did not mean by "profit"; and another rejecting governmental bureaucracy. The statement was submitted to the General Conference as a memorial requesting its adoption as the voice of the Church. It will shortly be issued, with other material, as a pamphlet. Send in your orders. (5c, with rates for quantities.)

WHAT GENERAL CONFERENCE DID

General Conference took four actions in our field: concerning (1) peace and war, (2) a proposed commission, (3) the use of the word Methodist, (4) the economic question.

On Peace and War. It declared "that the Methodist Episcopal Church, as an institution does not endorse, support or purpose to participate in war," and it asked the Federal Council of Churches to try to find a way by which "the spiritual ministry of the churches to the armed forces of the United States may be performed by ministers appointed and supported by and amenable to the churches."

No Oracle. It rejected a proposal asking the appointment of a commission "to represent the church in the public announcement of the findings of the General Conference on social, economic and political questions and . . . to interpret the attitude of the church toward such questions" between General Conference sessions.

Use of Word Methodist. It adopted a report which declared that unofficial groups of Methodists cannot be denied the use of the word Methodist, which "includes all who belong to any branch of the Wesleyan family." It said that such groups have "a moral obligation to make their unofficial relationship clear at all times." This we have always done. Indeed we suggested that all such groups should put the word, "unofficial," after their title.

THE STATEMENT ON SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC QUESTIONS

The significance of this statement lies in what it fails to say. Following recent developments in the Congregational denomination it marks clearly the limits to official ecclesiastical utterances on the present state of organized society. For us its meaning lies in the questions that we, and kindred unofficial groups in other denominations, have now to raise and answer if religion is to have any voice concerning them.

Leading Ideas. They are: The right of the Church to speak concerning the crisis; the demand for the elimination of specified anti-social facts which are destructive of the Christian ideal of personality and brotherhood; a desire for a united Methodism moving toward a Christian social order; a statement of the position of three differing Methodist groups concerning causes and solutions of the un-Christian facts cited, with a refusal to pass judgment; a vigorous defense of democracy. There are four sectional heads. Under each of them we point out the task that is left for us to undertake.

Religious Grounds. The social force of Christianity is made to depend upon the sacredness of personality. The transforming social action of a regenerating religion is

ascribed only to transformed individuals. The Christian demand for brotherhood is mentioned but the corporate out-working of "the transforming power of Christ," in the Church and in other social groupings, is not recognized. This is the fallacy of a personal evangelism that wants to be something more, now revived in the Oxford group. It is an escape from the hazardous task of Christianizing institutional life, of transforming those elements in the social order which are more than, though the result of, the mere combination of individuals.

In this field our task then is: *To expound the inseparable relationship between the gospel values of personality and brotherhood; to make clear the social nature of personality, the inter-dependence and inter-penetration of the individual and organized society which Jesus and the prophets sensed instinctively because they belonged to the Hebrew community, which they desired to make the family of God.*

The Facts. The fourteen facts mentioned are not related to each other, nor to the economic order, as is the section on religious grounds when it demands "an economic order wherein the fundamental objective is fullness of life for all." The weakness of this educationally popular factual method when dealing with the present crisis is that it is like trying to deal with drunkedness without changing the nature of the drunkard.

The nearest the statement comes to this is in declaring the continuance of "these conditions" to be "sinful in the sight of God." One of them is "the excessive debt carried by American productive enterprise . . . resulting in a carrying charge that precludes adequate wages for workers or reasonable dividends for owners." But these two things cannot be equated. Christian ethics has traditionally given a different moral status to the right of the worker (including the sick and the aged) to eat, and the claim of the owner to dividends. Nothing is said about the nature of an economic order which fails to unite the functions of owning and working creatively for personal and social well-being. No judgment is passed upon the behavior pattern which goes on piling up the "excessive debt" declared to be "sinful." *That task has been left for us, just as in the Church of England long ago the task of convincing the individual of sin and of bringing him to repentance and newness of life, was left to the Society of Methodists.*

Some Proposed Solutions. This section first gives a good summary of our statement concerning the causes of the present crisis and the Christian way out (See March Bulletin), but it errs in ascribing to us the term "acquisitive principle" as equivalent to "the struggle for profit." We have not used that term because the real leaders of capitalist society are after control more than possessions. The struggle for profit exalts the love of power even more than greed. It is also the war principle, the method of fight instead of mutual aid.

The next group, whose position is said to repudiate ours, does not speak with its own voice. Its position is stated in a long quotation from a recent report of the Brookings Institute, whose authors do not even speak as Christians, but as professional defenders of the capitalist economy. So there is no discussion of moral values, no mention of spiritual ends. There is complete disjunction between this statement and the religious grounds set forth in section I.

Neither is any economic solution offered, only wishful thinking. In somewhat vague terms the failure of the present system to realize existing productive capacity is ascribed to its failure to pass on sufficient purchasing power to the masses. Then we are told that the best business minds have recognized this but the lesser men won't listen to them. As a matter of fact the business advocates of the "new capitalism" have not been able to listen to themselves. They cannot do what they know ought to be done to save the system. Hoover pled with the corporations not to cut wages. Roosevelt exhorted them to lower prices but not wages. Yet the demonstrated trend today is to raise profits faster than production, jobs, or wages. What then is the point of the Brookings' economists saying that the way to save capitalism is to reduce prices without lowering wages? They are like the prophets of old who called on their God all day for fire from Heaven, even cutting themselves with knives, but there was no answer. We know now that they were false prophets, calling upon a dead God. Elijah knew it then.

The next group represented, all too briefly, is that which believes in the cooperative movement as the "middle way" of economic salvation.

The conclusion of this section is "Because of the difference of opinion as to method, the sincerity and standing of the individuals arguing the cases at issue, we do not pass judgment on techniques." Then the statement immediately contradicts itself by saying "we will test concrete proposals and systems by the Christian doctrine of personality." When and how? The answer apparently is when the technique is popularly accepted, because in the next section the technique of democracy is vigorously approved, both in the political and economic order. So then the Church follows but does not lead. It remains for us then *to insist that ends cannot be assessed, any more than realized, apart from means; to constantly analyze "techniques" and declare their relation to the Christian values, that is, their capacity for reaching the goal sought.*

The Case for Democracy. This is an expansion of our own statement but in less concrete form. It discusses democracy as an abstract ideal. For instance, "The struggle of conflicting interests cannot be avoided . . . but in democracy such conflict is under law and order." The reports of the Civil Liberties Union and our own Bulletin on this question

show an entirely different situation. The same oversight occurs in the section on sinful facts when "outbreaks of mob violence" are mentioned with no reference to the violence of the forces of law and order which constitutes the bigger part of the current record on that matter. In these cases democracy officially destroys itself. Until we know why and how this happens we shall not save the democratic process, and our high sounding phrases concerning it will be but sounding brass and tinkling cymbals.

It is easy to say "class consciousness has no place in a democratic community" but it is here. What the Church needs to be told is what to do about it. It can stand off and "repudiate the entire concept of class war," but that alone is more likely to help it along than to stop it. The statement is impartially against all dictatorships and repressions, but it gives the Church no guidance concerning the differing relationships of personal and class dictatorships to democracy. It ignores the fact that democracy itself becomes, when its life is threatened, the dictatorship of the majority. It mentions Communism first, and Fascism second, despite the plain fact that it is Fascist forces which are now seeking power in this country.

Thus there is left to us the continuous task of analyzing the movements that are for democracy and those that would destroy it, of rallying our Church forces to stop Fascist trends at every point, of translating the ideal of democracy into a growing fact.

THE BASIC QUESTION

Why this kind of an utterance? Why is it neutral concerning the economic order when as Bishop Blake said at our Conference luncheon, "This is no time to be neutral." The answer lies in the declaration "We desire a united Methodism . . ." The Church must be saved! Does that come before the needs of humanity? Or the compulsions of the "Kingdom of God?"

The method advocated to secure Methodist unity on this issue is "united study." Will this reconcile the irreconcilable? In our record there is a long attempt to do this on the slavery question but it failed. *The time has come once again when organized society must change its way of life or go down to decay and destruction. The spirit of Jesus and the Will of God are on one side or the other. It is a joint question of economic fact and moral choice. Either the capitalist economy has broken down or it has not. Either its basic principle is right or it is wrong. Either it promotes the development of Christian values or it limits and destroys them. How long does the Church go limping between two opinions? If God is our God let us serve Him. If Mammon, then frankly serve him. Both we cannot do. The day of choice has come.*

FUNCTION—PROGRAM

The Job. Never was this organization needed as much as it is needed now. We are grateful to those who have maintained its right to be. Because there is no final recovery for the capitalist order, the forces of reaction will become more aggressive. Our only possible answer to them, to the call of desperate human need, to the inescapable compulsion of our gospel, is a more aggressive campaign in behalf of the social change required alike by the human situation and the imperatives of our religion.

The Charter. We have a clear three-point program (see March Bulletin): (1) The Christian religion compels us to reject the method of the struggle for profit as the economic base for society. (2) The substitute must be the method of social-economic planning under democratic control, with social ownership of all things necessary to its successful operation, as the method by which the Christian principle of service and the development of personality can be progressively realized. (3) This change is to be sought by education and democratic discussion, not by violence. This program now becomes our charter. Not since the adoption of the Social Creed have we had so clear a position. Note that it is only a program, not a platform. It represents basic principles to be discussed and worked out. It now becomes our job to educate the church as to its meaning and through this process to discover its further meaning.

Those who want to go in this general direction are welcome in our ranks. Also those who know that something is seriously wrong, but are not quite sure what.

CARRYING IT OUT

The Regional and National Conferences gave us a general mandate as to how to proceed.

Education—Evangelism—Action. There must be a nation-wide campaign of educational social evangelism, linked with action. In education and evangelism old methods—study courses, conferences, seminars, "revival meetings," preaching missions, street preaching,—must be given new content. And both must be linked with action, in cooperation with other groups,—hearings, parades and demonstrations, protest delegations, picketing, defense of civil liberties. Thirty members at our National Conference signed up to do some volunteer work as educational social evangelists in their districts. *Who else will volunteer—and go right to work?* Some of our preachers individually and in groups have been taking a hand in strike situations and in organizing the unemployed. *Let us know whether you will do this in your community; and whether we can help you.*

Working Committees. Part of this program can best be carried on by committees doing intensive work with special groups. Committees have been set up or will be to carry on

educational work among rural people, women, youth, Negroes, and to enlist them in action. *Members are asked to volunteer to serve on these committees.*

Organizational Form. The program calls for more and better machinery. A National Committee of One Hundred, widely representative geographically, is being formed. Not less than one fifth of the members will be laymen and women—up to one-half if they can be found. It will be expected to meet in sections, each having a chairman. It will elect a new Executive Committee of fifteen. It is proposed that hereafter this Committee of One Hundred be elected at an annual meeting, all members in good standing being voters.

Members are asked to send at once nominations for this Committee. Also to volunteer to organize state committees to plan for work in each state.

Printed Matter. At once there appears the need for popular printed matter. We will issue soon a general pamphlet "Outline of a Christian Program for Social Change." It will be followed by a special laymen's pamphlet. There should be a mid-monthly Action Issue of the Social Questions Bulletin. And just as soon as possible we must have a popular weekly to be used by our members in carrying out our program.

Personnel and Office. We must have a larger staff. The National Conference voted to secure a full-time field secretary, or if this was not possible, to accept the proposal of the Fellowship of Reconciliation to engage jointly Charles C. Webber for work in both organizations. In the meantime we were faced with the necessity of releasing Winifred Chappell for a while, for a much needed rest. The Executive Committee canvassed the situation carefully and finally employed Charles C. Webber with the understanding that he would organize the new program, and would be set free as soon as possible from the executive work, to give full time in the field. He has accepted this task and begins work with us on July 1. As the program develops we must have more workers in the field, and additional help with our publications program. The question of carrying out the recommendation of the Conferences to move the office to the middle west was also canvassed. It was decided that this was not practicable at present, but that it would be done as soon as possible.

The New Secretary. Mr. Webber is a member of the New York East Conference and before that belonged to the Colorado Conference. He was born in the middle west and is a graduate of the University of Michigan. He is a graduate also of Boston University School of Theology, has his Master's degree from Columbia, and has done graduate work at Harvard and at Union Theological Seminary. Since 1927 he has been Assistant Director of Field Work at Union. He has held several pastorates in labor and down-town communities—in Denver, New York City and the Pennsylvania coal fields. He has participated actively in industrial conflicts—in the textile industry in Pennsylvania, the coal fields of Virginia, and elsewhere. As far as time and funds permit he will be available to help set up programs of educational social evangelism and action in local communities. *Our members are invited to call on him.*

FINANCE

Where From? This program calls for money. Our National Meeting tripled our budget, raising it from $4,000 to $12,000. Our Finance Committee, headed by Spencer Bacon Owens, of Albion, Mich., says that the money can be found. Members present at our series of conferences this year (just a fraction of our membership) pledged $1,556—an estimated 300% increase over the previous giving of these persons. A few of our active members are getting more pledges. The June Conferences offer an opportunity. New York East led off with a carefully organized campaign, resulting in pledges of $666. Members in Pacific Northwest, California, Idaho, Colorado, New England, Michigan and Detroit Conferences report plans to help raise this bigger budget.

How Much From You? One of our two highest givers has raised his gift from $200 to $300—$25 a month. A layman will give $30 a quarter. A mid western preacher on a moderate salary has multiplied his gift by ten. Some members who have given $5 a year are making it $5 a month. Some $1 givers are making it $12—$1 a month. This monthly giving represents the application to this Cause of the method used to finance your local church. It means that we will know what we can count on.

Our members will receive about the time they get this Bulletin, a letter containing a pledge card. Upon their response depends the success of the new program.

Four new books in our field: "Christian Faith and Economic Change," Luccock, Abingdon Press, $2.00; "The Prophets of Israel," Edith Hamilton, W. W. Norton, $2.50; "The Great Galilean Returns," Henry Kendall Booth, Scribner's, $2.00; "Christianity and the Social Revolution," edited by Lewis, Polanyi and Kitchin, Scribner's, $3.00.

A $1 membership brings this Bulletin once a month except in July and August. 20c plus 1½c postage brings our set of 18 Crisis Leaflets.